

# News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Asilomar Celebrates 50-Year Anniversary as a State Park**

PACIFIC GROVE, CA - Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a California State Park this year. A rededication event will be held at Asilomar on Thursday, June 29, from approximately 12 noon to 2 p.m., marking 50 years since the park's original dedication.

The rededication ceremony will have a festive atmosphere, complete with presentations from State Park Chief Deputy Director Paul Romero and other dignitaries, live music, honors, activities, cake, and refreshments.

The public is invited to this free event and to share any memories, photos, and other nostalgia of time you've enjoyed at Asilomar as a visitor, employee, trainee, or with family and friends. Please call the State Park staff to make arrangements to share your memorabilia and to R.S.V.P. for the event at (831) 372-4076 or (831) 233-4801.

## **Asilomar Background History from 1956**

**July 1, 1956, in a ceremony at Merrill Hall, Asilomar and property along the coastline, a combined 91 acres, was officially dedicated as a unit of the California State Park System.** As a condition of becoming a state park, Governor Goodwin Knight stipulated that the City of Pacific Grove would lease Asilomar from the state and operate the facility. The City subleased it for 25 years to a corporation whose board consisted of City Council members. This resulted in the property belonging to the people of California without having to pay taxes for its support. Surpluses were to be reinvested in a long-range project to bring to maximum beauty and efficiency to the buildings on the grounds.

Architect Julia Morgan designed 16 structures at Asilomar from 1913 to 1928. She designed the buildings to reflect the needs of the YWCA women and to mirror the philosophy of the California Arts & Crafts movement, which maintained that the healthiest and happiest lives came from a close relationship with nature, that nature was to be lived in, not conquered. They represent her largest collection of this style of building in one location.

Between 1956 and 1959, two new units had been completed. Surf and Sand were dedicated on September 20, 1959. The architectural firm of John Carl Warnecke and Associates designed

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these buildings and also Seascape and Woodlands (1961), Sea Galaxy (1963), Corporation Yard (1963), Housekeeping (1965), Longviews (1966), and View Crescent (1968). Architects from Smith Barker & Hanssen designed North Woods and East Woods complexes in 1973-74. Architect Clark Davis completed the last set of buildings in 1981 with the addition of the Fireside and Forest Lodge complexes. In November 1987, the conference grounds were listed as both a National Historic Landmark and a National Register of Historic Places District.

The ecosystem of Asilomar's 26 acres of sand dunes was near extinction by the early 1980s from the dunes having been used for livestock grazing in the 1800s, a recreation sport arena in the 1920s, and uncontrolled public walking paths once it became a full-service conference ground. Sand dune restoration began in 1984 by State Park resource staff, based on the principle that "a dune environment can be preserved in a natural condition while accommodating public use." The first action was to begin removing all ice plant and exotics. The dunes were then resculpted with a bulldozer and revegetated by hydroseeding and hand planting of over 20 native dune plant species to stabilize the dunes. Lastly, nearly a mile of boardwalk was constructed for visitor access into the dunes. Today, the dunes have been restored with native plants such as pink and yellow verbenas, beach sagewort, and dune ryegrass.

Today, Asilomar State Beach and Conference Grounds totals 107 acres of native forest, sand dunes, and scenic coastline and includes the William Penn Mott Jr. Training Center, the hub of State Parks' employee training. Its forests, beaches, and tidepools are carefully administered to protect the native plants and animals. Guest services are provided by the hospitality concessionaire, Delaware North Parks Services. At Asilomar, State Parks' mission remains steadfast, to preserve the original character of Asilomar, to ensure the park visitor a place of refuge closely aligned with nature and where Architect Julia Morgan's buildings "as an art form" will forever remain the standard for all future construction, and that it remain a "refuge by the sea".

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